



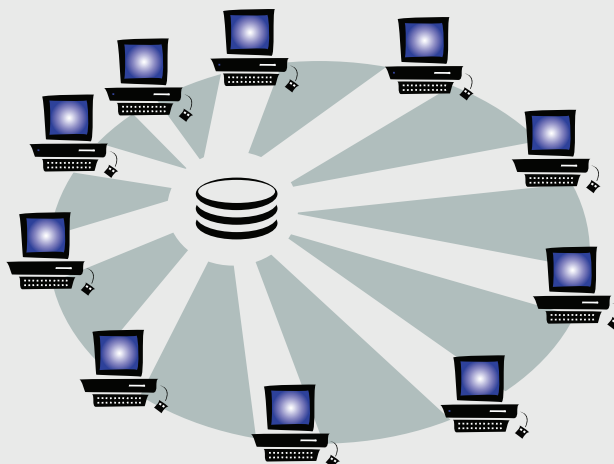
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Best Backup Practices for the Dental Office

Why using an off-site backup strategy makes good business sense



With more dental practices attempting to go paperless, what are the best options to ensure data is kept safe? Online backup is a technology that will store essential data off-site for retrieval if a disaster such as flood, fire or theft should occur. Factors that generally play in the selection of an online backup solution include security, speed, reliability, uptime, quality, customer service and cost.

Why does a dentist need an off-site backup service?

Dentists are increasingly switching from a paper-based records system to

one that is fully electronic and automated. The reasons are clear, and the benefits are many; maintaining records in an electronic database is simpler for health-care professionals and greatly increases efficiency, which, in turn, leads to greater office productivity. With electronic record-keeping, finding important information, like patient histories, X-rays, appointments, invoices, purchase orders and even tax records, is just a few keystrokes away.

Despite the advantages, one thing hasn't changed: The risk inherent in keeping valuable information on-site and in one place.

The possibility of permanent damage to data is always there. Events like flooding, fire and vandalism do happen, and though insurance might cover the material costs, it certainly can't replace the most important aspect of a successful practice: information.

Some other issues that lead to loss of data include hard-drive crashes, backup tapes failing and theft. In any of these situations, not only does the practice lose valuable equipment, but also the lost data is impossible to recover. In fact, many businesses have both a legal and an ethical obligation to protect patients' confidential data. As an indication of how important

data is to a business, the U.S. Bureau of Labor indicates that 93 percent of companies that lose data are out of business within five years.

There is a slightly better choice than keeping all data on-site, though it still leaves practices open to some potential problems: the traditional moveable backup. For example, traditional backups can still be damaged, negating the entire point of backing up data, and they also leave open the possibility of identity theft. Data is stored in an un-encrypted format, such as a CD, that, if lost or stolen, can expose client information. Sending your moveable backup home with an assistant or office administrator isn't good practice, from the standpoint of either privacy or security. After all, not everyone always acts in good faith, and employees do move from one practice to another.

It's impossible to argue against the fact that lost data, because of a poor backup strategy, translates to lost money for every business, but even more so for businesses that rely heavily on information, like dental practices.

What are the key technical requirements of an off-site backup system/service?

In order to backup files off-site, the practice will have to be equipped with a high-speed Internet link, accessible 24-7, from which data can be backed up to the remote location. An Internet provider may have an upload cap, i.e. a maximum upload speed, so this detail is also important to consider.

What features should a dentist look for when evaluating an off-site backup service?

When deciding which backup service to choose, it's important to consider the following:

- Does the software work well with existing practice management or imaging software?
- Can it be automated and scheduled at intervals to ensure that there are no

requirements by the dental practice to continually monitor the software?

- Does the off-site backup service provide the dental practice with reports, detailing the number of successful backups?
- Is there a support team proactively identifying potentially problematic issues and notifying the business that there could be an issue with the backup, the computer or data?
- Is the service encrypting and securing the data before broadcasting across the Internet to the backup servers? AES (Advanced Encryption Standard) is the encryption standard algorithm approved by NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology).
- Does the software offer multiple secure locations for redundancy?
- Does the software allow the practice to keep or retain multiple versions

of data, so recovery can be performed from a specific date and not the most recent backup?

What is the price range for a quality off-site system? Are there optional extras that are worthwhile to a dental practice?

Prices vary depending on the service offering. A good backup system that has the highest level of encryption and secured facilities can range between \$19.99/month for 3GB unlimited backups during the month, right up to \$50/month for 10GB of data. Since only the data files require regular backup, the majority of dental practice management databases should be fine with a monthly service of between 1 and 3 GB.

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In regards to “free” online backup systems, live by this rule: if something seems too good to be true, than it probably is. Though these services might be good enough for an undergraduate student to store an essay or some research, they lack the security and speed required for a dental office to meet minimum privacy requirements

What alternatives might a dentist consider before retaining an off-site backup service?

The only effective alternative to off-site backup is the use of multiple USB hard drives that have an encrypting file system to protect data files if they are ever lost. Microsoft Windows provides bit-locker drive encryption in Windows Vista Business and Windows 7 Professional and above. You will still need to manually perform the backup or change USB hard drives daily to ensure redundancy. An encrypting password must also be entered every time a backup is required, which still leaves the dental practice vulnerable internally.

Ultimately, the best security and peace of mind for dental offices is an off-site backup. They offer safety, privacy and efficiencies unavailable through traditional backup strategies. 

Scott Holmes is CEO of Exacep Offsite Backup. He has 12 years of computer systems experience, with certifications in Microsoft, Apple, Cisco, Comptia, Citrix, Left Hand Networks & VMware. Three years ago, Scott started Exacep Offsite Backup, which primarily focuses on providing online backup for the medical and dental industry. Scott can be contacted at sholmes@exacep.com.

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